

Simbrahs' grainfed double

CENTRAL Queensland Simbrah breeders Reg and Janelle Cooke (pictured with their children Justin, 10, Alexis, 4, Ashley, 5, and Cassie, 2), Warrenlea, Moura, made history and took out a rare grainfed double on Monday after a pen of 10 of their grainfed Simbrah steers won grand champion pen at the Beef 2009 Beef Cattle Championships.

Their win will see the Simbrah breed name grace the championships honour board for the first time since the competition's inception in 1988 – joining the Droughtmaster, Brahman and Charbray breeds as being among the nation's best.

Adding to their stunned jubilation, the Cookes took out the grainfed double, also winning champion pen of grainfed heifers.

Arriving at the saleyards on Monday, the Mr and Mrs Cooke said they were "in shock but thrilled" with their success.

"To achieve this is a great honour – it's everything our family has been working towards for years," Mr Cooke said.

"I learnt it all off my father, Barry,



who has been breeding Simbrahs since 1977.

"The steers and heifers here today are all mates from the same herd."

Their grand champion pen of 10 Simbrah steers weighed in at an average of 611kg, and had been on corn ration feed for 149 days at their own 499-head feedlot at Moura.

The steers snagged the top prize of the competition after winning Class 8 for steers 560-740kg, milk teeth only, with minimum 100 days on grain and suitable for the Japanese market.

Meanwhile, the Cookes' champion pen of 12 grainfed heifers weighed in at an average of 477kg and claimed the broad ribbon after winning Class 10 for heifers 350-560kg, maximum two teeth, minimum 60 days grainfeeding

and suitable for local trade.

The heifers had been fed corn ration for 119 days.

The Cookes run a 100 percent commercial operation comprising about 500 Simbrah breeders and put their stock on feed for an average of 100 days before selling directly to meatworks.

"Regardless of whether you want to do trade cattle or aim for the Japanese market or finish them on grass, you can – they're just so versatile," Mrs Cooke said.

"They are an easy breed to get the grade right at any age."

Mr Cooke's parents, Barry and Doreen Cooke, Tharlane, Miles, were the first producers to start breeding Simbrahs in Queensland.

They too tasted success on Monday with a pen of 10 of their Simbrah steers winning Class 9 for steers 360-640kg, maximum two teeth, minimum 70 days on grain and suitable for local trade.

– Story: MELISSA MARTIN. Picture: RODNEY GREEN.



Prime cattle master piece



Simbrah cattle breeders Reg and Janelle Cooke from Moura cleaned up in the grainfed section of Australia's biggest prime beef show in

By JAMES NASON and MELISSA MARTIN

JUST as major sporting events have their gala opening ceremonies, Australia's biggest beef industry event kicked off with a special opening event of its own this week – a major prime cattle show and sale.

And, befitting of the beef industry extravaganza it helped to launch on Monday, the yarding assembled for the Beef 2009 cattle championships was a sight to behold in every way. "Definitely the best line-up of commercial cattle I have ever seen," was the considered opinion of Moura Droughtmaster breeder Ray Hicks, who has been attending sales at Gracemere for close to 60 years.

Visitors were treated to a smorgasboard of blue-ribbon beef in every direction, a yarding bulging with almost 2400 top quality prime cattle representing every major breed and breeding area of Queensland.

The sheer numbers and uniformly high standard of cattle throughout ensured the event was one of – if not the – toughest commercial cattle competitions in Australia.

Against this backdrop, it was an ecstatic moment for Simbrah cattle breeders Reg and Janelle Cooke, Warrenlea, Moura, when they learned they had won not one but two of the event's four major championships. The family's exhibits won awards for the grand champion pen with their grain fed steers, and champion pen of grain fed heifers.

Their grand champion pen of 10 Simbrah steers weighed in at an average of 611kg, and had been fed for 149 days on corn ration.

They went on to take out the major prize of the competition after winning the class for pen of 10 steers, 560-740kg, milk teeth only, with minimum 100 days on grain and suitable for the Japanese market.

The Cooke's champion pen of 12 grain fed heifers weighed in at 477kg and claimed the broadribbon after winning Class 10 – pen of 12 heifers, 350-560kg, maximum two teeth, minimum 60 days grain feeding and suitable for local trade.

The heifers had been fed corn ration for 119 days.

In the grassfed section, the major prizes were divided between Rodger Jefferis, Elrose, Cloncurry and the Wilson family, Banana Station, Banana. Mr Jefferis' pen of 10 steers, weighing 658kg, initially won the class for steers weighing 560-740kg with a maximum of four teeth before being judged grand champion pen of grassfed cattle.

The steers were bred on Mr Jefferis' northern most property and came down to Moura as weaners where they have been on irrigated leucaena and buffell grass. Another pen of pure Brahman exhibits entered by Elrose Enterprises also performed well in the grainfed section, taking third place in the 560-740kg, two to four tooth, minimum 100 day grain class.

The Wilson family's Banana

Station was a worthy winner of the award for most successful exhibitor after claiming two class victories and two second places in what is easily one of the toughest and hardest to win prime cattle competitions in Australia.

Their exhibits claimed first place in the Japanese market class for crop or pasture fed pen of steers, 560-740kg, 4-6 tooth; first place in the export market class for a pen of crop or pasture fed heifers weighing over 450kg and a maximum six teeth, second place in the local trade class for crop or pasture fed pen of 10 steers, 380-640kg, maximum two teeth; and second in the local trade class for pen of crop or pasture fed heifers weighing 360-520kg with a maximum of two teeth.

The pen of pasture or crop fed heifers that won the class for heifers weighing 450kg up to six teeth then went on to be judged the grand champion pen of grassfed females.

The Banana Station cattle herd has been developed up from a British breed base over the past 30 years to include several genotypes designed to maximise the herd's productivity in the Central Queensland environment, according to Richard Wilson, who was among the pioneers of carefully managed cross breeding in Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mr Wilson has introduced bloodlines from all over the world to develop a distinctive CQ-oriented type that he describes as a half bos Indicus and part European herd developed from a British base.

The yarding was a compelling endorsement of the best genetics that the Australian cattle herd has to offer, and a rare showcase of prime cattle in an era when the vast majority of finished cattle go straight to works and never see a saleyard.

Chairman of the commercial cattle show organising committee Andrew Mactaggart said the event was by far the biggest event of its type in Australia.

"It is the prestige of the event that attracts the top quality cattle in large volumes," Mr Mactaggart said.

"It is three years of planning to get the event up and running for the committee, and at least two years for the vendors. It is great recognition for the years of work they put into breeding quality cattle."

Mr Mactaggart has been helping to organise the commercial cattle championships since Beef 2003 and said the main change during that time had been the way cattle were finished for market.

"There has been a shift from 2003 to a much higher percentage of grainfed exhibits, which reflects the dynamics of the market," he said.

There were close to 1500 grainfed exhibits this year, compared to slightly less than 1000 grassfed exhibits, a turnaround from the first Beef Australia expositions when grassfed cattle dominated the yardings.

● See next week's edition of *Queensland Country Life* for full class results from the Beef 2009 commercial cattle championships.

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